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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 003826

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KS KN JA

SUBJECT: DPRK MISSILES SHOOT DOWN MINDAN-CHOSEN SOREN  
RECONCILIATION

REF: TOKYO 003782

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A recent reconciliation accord between pro-Seoul and pro-Pyongyang organizations of Korean residents in Japan has become an early casualty of the DPRK missile launches. The agreement, aimed at ending 50 years of confrontation between the rival groups, had been shaky from the start and went up in smoke July 6, a day after the missile salvo. Although both groups are bracing for possible demonstrations/retribution against Korean institutions and individuals, Mindan tells us the situation so far is calmer than what followed in the wake of the August 1998 Taepodong shot over Japan. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On May 17, an historic agreement was unveiled between the pro-Seoul Korean Residents Union in Japan (Mindan) and the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chosen Soren, or Chongryun in Korean). The accord was designed to end, in the name of "ethnic unity," decades of confrontation and rivalry between the two groups and begin a new era of cooperation. The agreement was shaky from the start, particularly among Mindan members, whose distrust of Chosen Soren and the DPRK remains intense. Less than a month after the accord was announced, Mindan backed out of a joint unification ceremony on June 15 that was to commemorate the 2000 South-North summit, due to opposition by regional Mindan chapters. The July 5 DPRK missile shots proved fatal to the already-weakened accord.

¶3. (C) On July 6, Embassy Tokyo Political Officer talked with Ha Chung Nam, International Bureau Director at the Mindan Head Office in Tokyo. Ha confirmed that the DPRK action had driven the final nail in the coffin and that Mindan leader Ha Byong Ok would be visiting Chosen Soren headquarters later in the day to deliver a formal statement abrogating the agreement. Director Ha later called us to report that no one in Chosen Soren was prepared to receive the statement; instead, Mindan had been directed to "mail it" to the organization. Despite the end of the formal accord, Ha said, Mindan would continue to try some cooperative endeavors at the local level, aimed at further weakening Korean residents' allegiance to Chosen Soren.

¶4. (C) Asked about general developments in the Korean community in Japan, Ha described all indicators as headed up for Mindan and down for Chosen Soren. His estimate of affiliation among the roughly 600,000 Korean residents in

Japan was 90% Mindan and 10% Chosen Soren. (Comment: While trend lines in membership of the two organizations have been headed in opposite directions for many years, Ha's estimate is the largest gap we've heard so far.) Ha also described dramatically declining enrollment at Chosen Soren-affiliated schools. While the number of such schools had declined in recent years from approximately 100 nationwide to 60-70 currently, Ha said the number of students in the schools was even more significantly down. Ha described a case in which the City of Yokohama had put 300 million yen of public money into refurbishing one such school, only to find out that there were only six students in attendance. The expenditure subsequently became an issue at the city council.

¶15. (C) Turning to the immediate post-missile shot situation, Ha said Mindan and Korean residents in general were concerned about possible demonstrations against Korean institutions and acts of retaliation against individuals. So far, however, Mindan had seen very few cases, Ha noted. He compared the situation favorably with that which developed in the wake of the Taepodong shot that flew over Japan in August 1998, which triggered a number of unfortunate incidents.

(Note: According to AmConGen Osaka, Kansai Public Security Investigation Bureau (KPSIB) officials confirm that the Chosen Soren headquarters in Osaka, location of the largest concentration of Korean residents in Japan, has requested additional police protection at Osaka's Korean schools, due to the threat of Japanese right wing attacks on students and facilities.)

¶16. (C) Finally, Political Officer recalled being in the office of a Diet member from Osaka at the time of the 1998 Taepodong launch. In the Political Officer's presence, the

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Diet member called Osaka headquarters of the Chosen Soren to demand an official comment on the missile shot. At that time, Chosen Soren had no talking points in hand and nothing to say. Mindan Director Ha confirmed that the current situation was the same: Chosen Soren had been caught flat-footed again.

SCHIEFFER